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ABSTRACT

The New York Regents Competency Testing Program has been designed to assure that all students develop adequate skills in reading comprehension, writing, and mathematics before graduation from high school. In this booklet, information is provided on two elements of the Regents Competency Testing Program: diploma standards and screening tests. Minimum standards of achievement in reading comprehension, writing, and mathematics must be met in order to receive a high school diploma. The requirements for a local high school diploma, a Regents high school diploma, and a local certificate are outlined. The competency testing requirements are described, and examples from the Regents Competency Tests are presented. For students whose native language is other than English, alternative testing procedures are available. The Regents Competency Testing Program also emphasizes the early identification of students who need special help in developing their skills. Beginning in grade 3, screening tests are administered to identify students who need special help. Those tests are also described in this bulletin. (BW)

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The Regents Competency Testing Program

Information Bulletin

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THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Albany, New York 12234
September 1982

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FOREWORD

The Regents Competency Testing Program has been designed to assure that all students develop adequate skills in reading comprehension, writing, and mathematics before graduation from high school. The program has three basic elements that contribute to the accomplishment of this goal.

First, the Board of Regents has established minimum standards of achievement in reading comprehension, writing, and mathematics that must be met in order to receive a local high school diploma. Students may demonstrate their competence in these fundamental skills by passing designated Regents competency tests or Regents examinations, by obtaining minimum acceptable scores on the College Board's Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or the American College Testing Program (ACT) test, or through alternative testing procedures.

Second, the program emphasizes the early identification of students who need special help in developing their skills in reading comprehension, writing, and mathematics. Beginning in grade 3 and continuing through grade 8 or 9, screening tests are administered to students at specified grade levels to identify those students who need special help. School principals are encouraged to do additional screening at those grade levels where instruments are not provided by the State Education Department.

Third, the Commissioner's Regulations require schools to provide appropriate remedial programs for students who score below specified reference points on the screening tests or who fail a final competency test. The remedial instruction must be designed to enable students to pass the Regents competency tests by the time they are otherwise qualified to graduate. The Regulations also require school principals to keep parents informed with respect to test results and remedial instruction.

In the sections that follow, information is provided on the first two elements of the Regents Competency Testing Program—diploma standards and screening tests. Recommendations for remedial programs may be obtained from the Office of General Education.

CONTENTS

	Page
Foreword	i
High School Credentials	1
Local High School Diploma	1
Regents High School Diploma	1
Local Certificate	1
Competency Testing Requirements	2
Reading Comprehension and Writing	2
Mathematics	2
Descriptions of the Regents Competency Tests	3
Regents Competency Test in Reading	3
Regents Competency Test in Writing	6
Regents Competency Test in Mathematics	9
Alternative Testing Procedures for Students Whose Native Language Is Other Than English	11
Native Language Skills	11
English Language Skills	11
Mathematics Skills	12
Further Information	12
Modifications in Testing Procedures for Students With Handicapping Conditions	15
Identification of Students Needing Special Help	17
Reading Comprehension	17
Writing	17
Mathematics	18

HIGH SCHOOL CREDENTIALS

The Board of Regents has authorized registered high schools in New York State to award three types of credentials. Each of these credentials is described below.

Local High School Diploma

A local high school diploma may be awarded to students who successfully complete an approved four-year course of study and demonstrate competence in the basic skills of reading comprehension, writing, and mathematics. Students must earn a minimum of 16 units of credit, including 4 units of English, 3 units of social studies, 1 unit each of mathematics and science, and ½ unit of health. Students must also complete a 3-unit sequence in a field other than English or social studies and must have had physical education.

Regents High School Diploma

In addition to a local high school diploma, qualified students may be awarded a Regents high school diploma. This may be a separate credential or it may be in the form of an endorsement on the local diploma. A Regents diploma or endorsement signifies that a student has earned at least 18 units of credit and has passed certain Regents examinations. The required examinations are in English, in social studies, and in the student's major sequence, e.g., mathematics, science, foreign languages.

Local Certificate

A local certificate may be awarded only to students who are identified as handicapped by the school district Committee on the Handicapped and who possess general intellectual capacity that falls lower than 1.5 standard deviations below the mean of the general population. To receive a certificate, the student must complete an appropriate individualized education program (IEP).

COMPETENCY TESTING REQUIREMENTS

The Regulations of the Commissioner of Education require students to demonstrate competence in the basic skills of reading comprehension, writing, and mathematics in order to earn a local high school diploma. The following sections provide information about the ways in which students may demonstrate competence in these basic skills.

Reading Comprehension and Writing

There are several methods of demonstrating competence in the basic skills of reading comprehension and writing. One is by passing the Regents comprehensive examination in English. Another is by passing the Regents competency tests in both reading and writing. A third method involves the use of scores earned on the College Board's Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or the American College Testing Program (ACT) tests.

Students whose native language is other than English may use a fourth alternative method of demonstrating competence if they entered a school where English is the predominant language of instruction after they completed the eighth grade. These students must demonstrate (1) reading and writing proficiency in their native language and (2) reasonable progress toward mastery of the English language. Further information concerning this alternative method is provided on pages 11–14.

Mathematics

Students may demonstrate competence in mathematics by passing any Regents examination in mathematics, including business mathematics, or by passing the Regents competency test in mathematics. Students normally take the Regents competency test in mathematics after completing the course entitled "General High School Mathematics." SAT or ACT scores may also be used to demonstrate competence in mathematics.

Foreign language editions of the Regents competency test in mathematics are available for students whose native language is other than English.

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE REGENTS COMPETENCY TESTS

Regents Competency Test in Reading

The Regents Competency Test in Reading is designed to measure the student's ability to understand written materials of varying levels of difficulty. The test uses the Degrees of Reading Power methodology. It consists of a series of nonfiction prose passages on a variety of topics. Each passage contains about 300 words. The passages are presented in order of difficulty, beginning with easy material and progressing to difficult material. Seven words are omitted in each passage, and the student selects the most appropriate word from the five alternatives provided for each deleted word.

The test items are designed so that the text of the passages must be read and understood in order for the student to respond correctly. All of the response options "fit" the blank space; each one makes a grammatically correct and logically plausible sentence if the sentence is considered in isolation. However, only one response "fits" or is plausible when the surrounding context of the passage is considered. Thus, the selection of the correct response depends on understanding the prose in the surrounding text. The student should be able to respond correctly to all or nearly all items in the test to the point where he or she cannot understand a passage sufficiently well to decide which word is the correct choice.

The deleted words and the other response options are words in common use and are of uniform difficulty throughout the test. Thus, the test items become more difficult only with respect to the difficulty of the text in the passages.

All of the information that is needed to select the correct response is provided in the text of the passages; there is no need to supply information from memory or past experience. Only the ability to process sentences for meaning is required for success on the test.

In the area of reading, the standard for high school graduation is expressed in terms of readability. On the Regents Competency Test in Reading, the standard represents a sixty-five percent likelihood of success on prose material typically found in textbooks used in tenth and eleventh grade.

SAMPLE READING PASSAGE

Before anesthetics were discovered, surgery was carried out under very severe time restrictions. Patients were awake, tossing and screaming in terrible pain. Surgeons were forced to hurry in order to constrain suffering and minimize shock. __1__ was essential. Haste, however, did not make for good outcomes in surgery. No surprise, then, that the __2__ were often poor.

The discovery of anesthetics happened, in part, by accident. During the early 1800's, nitrous oxide and ether were used for entertainment. At "ether frolics" in theaters, volunteers would breathe these gasses, become lightheaded, and run around the stage laughing and dancing. By chance, a Connecticut dentist saw such a __3__. One volunteer banged his leg against a sharp edge. But he did not __4__. He paid no attention to his wound, as though he felt nothing. This gave the dentist the idea of using gas to kill pain.

At first, using the "open drip method," ether and chloroform were filtered through a cotton pad placed over the mouth and nose.

1 a) Blood b) Silence
c) Speed d) Water
e) Money

2 a) quarters b) teeth
c) results d) materials
e) families

3 a) show b) machine
c) face d) source
e) growth

4 a) dream b) recover
c) succeed d) agree
e) notice

This direct dose was difficult to regulate and irritating to the nose and throat. Patients would hold their breath, cough, or gag. This made it impossible for them to relax, let alone sleep. Consequently, surgery was often __5__. It couldn't begin until the patient had quieted and the anesthesia had taken hold.

5 a) delayed b) required
c) blamed d) observed
e) repeated

Today's procedures are safer and more accurate. In the "closed method" a fixed amount of gas is released from sealed bottles into an inhalator bag when the patient exhales. He inhales this gas through tubes with his next breath. In this way the gas is __6__. The system carefully regulates how much gas reaches the patient.

6 a) heated b) controlled
c) cleaned d) selected
e) wasted

For dentistry and minor operations, patients need not be asleep. Newer anesthetics can be used which deaden nerves only in the affected part of the body. These __7__ anesthetics offer several advantages. For instance, since the anesthesia is fairly light and patients remain awake, they can cooperate with their doctors.

7 a) local b) natural
c) ancient d) heavy
e) three

Regents Competency Test in Writing

The Regents Competency Test in Writing is a direct measure of a student's ability to organize and present ideas in written form. The test consists of three different types of writing tasks: a business letter, a report, and a piece of persuasive discourse (composition). For each task the specific test questions are based on one of the topics appearing in the list of 25 topics that has been established for that task.

In the business letter, the student requests corrective action because of a problem such as failure to receive a product ordered by mail, defective processing of film, or unsatisfactory repair of an item. In the report, the student reorganizes a set of notes and writes a unified report for a specific audience. Subjects include a meeting on energy resources, an interview with a performer, and a visit to a local industry. In the composition, the student attempts to persuade a specific audience by stating and supporting a position. For example, the student may be asked to persuade a parent concerning the need for a particular privilege or persuade a local public official concerning the need for summer jobs.

In the scoring of the Regents Competency Test in Writing, each answer is rated on the basis of its total effect and overall quality. Raters are given exemplary model answers and decide what percent of the model a student's answer represents. Each of the three answers for each student is rated by a different person. Thus, the total score for a student on the Regents Competency Test in Writing is a composite of three raters' judgments.

A student must obtain an average score of 65% or more in order to pass the test and meet the diploma standard. Answer papers with an average score of 60 or above are forwarded to the State Education Department for confirmation of the pass/fail decision.

SAMPLE BUSINESS LETTER QUESTION

Directions: Write a business letter concerning the situation described below. Carefully read all the information before you start to write.

The situation: On April 16, you ordered a poster by mail from Poster Company, Inc. The poster you ordered is "Happy Days," listed as No. 0166 in the company's catalog. You enclosed a check for $5.50 for full payment of the poster. It is now two months later and you have not received your poster.

Your task: Write a business letter concerning this situation to:
Poster Company, Inc., 235 East 25th Street, New York, New York 10034.

In your letter be sure to:

- Explain the situation
- Explain what you want the company to do for you
- Give complete and correct information
- Use an acceptable business letter form

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BUSINESS LETTER—MODEL ANSWER

5 Ferris Avenue
East Nassau, New York 12062
June 18, 1982

Poster Company, Inc.
235 East 25th Street
New York, New York 10034

Mesdames:

On April 16 I ordered a poster by mail from your firm. I ordered "Happy Days" catalog no. 0166, and enclosed a check for the full amount of $550. It is now June 18, and I still have not received my poster.

I am enclosing a copy of my cancelled check and a copy of my original letter ordering the poster. Please send me this poster as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Michelle Krupa

Enclosures

Regents Competency Test in Mathematics

The Regents Competency Test in Mathematics is designed to measure competence in the skills described in the syllabus, "General High School Mathematics." This is the recommended high school mathematics curriculum for students not enrolled in Regents mathematics courses. The test questions cover the core areas of: integers and rational numbers, including the fundamental operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division of whole numbers, decimals, and fractions; graphing, including critical analysis and interpretation of graphs and charts; measurement of geometric figures; ratio, proportion, and percent; probability and statistics; and consumer and job-related mathematics.

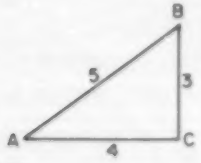
To meet the high school diploma standard, a student must obtain a score of 65% on the Regents Competency Test in Mathematics. The test contains a total of sixty questions, divided into two parts. In Part A there are twenty completion questions for which the student is to provide the answer. In Part B there are forty multiple-choice questions for which the student is to select the correct answer from among the four choices given.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Add:
$$\begin{array}{r} 3,192 \\ 206 \\ +5,341 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

Solve for x: $\frac{3}{4} = \frac{x}{16}$

What is the ratio of BC to AB in the triangle below?



Divide: $8\overline{)40.96}$

What is the average (mean) of 76, 87, and 86?

The circle graph below shows the sources of income for a local school district. From which source is the *smallest* amount of money received?

(a) Federal aid
(b) State aid
(c) property taxes
(d) private grants

What is the best approximation of the measure of angle *ABC*?

(a) 30°
(b) 60°
(c) 90°
(d) 120°

The fraction $\frac{4}{5}$ is equal to

(a) 45%
(b) 54%
(c) 80%
(d) 125%

Add: $\frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{2}$

(a) $\frac{1}{6}$
(c) $\frac{3}{4}$
(b) $\frac{2}{6}$
(d) $\frac{1}{8}$

A bus leaves its terminal at 10:30 a.m. and arrives at its destination at 1:15 p.m. on the same day. How long does the trip take?

(a) 3 hours 45 minutes
(b) 3 hours 30 minutes
(c) 3 hours 15 minutes
(d) 2 hours 45 minutes

Which is a prime number?

(a) 27
(b) 25
(c) 23
(d) 21

If 5 of the 20 liters in a car radiator are antifreeze, what percent of the mixture is antifreeze?

(a) 20%
(b) 25%
(c) 33%
(d) 75%

15

ALTERNATIVE TESTING PROCEDURES FOR STUDENTS WHOSE NATIVE LANGUAGE IS OTHER THAN ENGLISH

Students whose native language is other than English may demonstrate basic language and mathematics skills through alternative procedures if their first entry into a school where the predominant language is English was after grade eight. In the area of basic language skills, the students must:

(1) demonstrate reading comprehension and writing ability in their native language at a level comparable to that required for passing the Regents competency tests in reading and in writing, and

(2) demonstrate English language proficiency on examinations designed to measure English as a second language.

In the area of mathematics, the students must demonstrate mathematics skills in their native language at a level comparable to that required for passing the Regents competency test in mathematics.

Native Language Skills

Students may demonstrate proficiency in reading comprehension and writing in their native language by passing the Native Language Writing Test. The Native Language Writing Test is available in about 30 languages. The test consists of three parts—a personal letter and two compositions. Each task requires an answer of about 100–200 words.

If the Native Language Writing Test is not available in a student's native language, schools may use alternative examinations to determine that a student has achieved a level of proficiency in reading comprehension and writing comparable to that required for passing the Regents competency tests.

English Language Skills

To meet the minimum requirement for proficiency in English, students must demonstrate satisfactory progress toward mastery of the skills measured in the competency tests in reading and writing by obtaining a specified score on a test designed to measure English as a second language. The required level of English proficiency in-

creases according to the number of years of English instruction that the student has received.

Examples of tests that measure English as a second language are provided on page 14. A brief description of the tests and the recommended minimum scores for one to four years of high school study in English are included.

Mathematics Skills

Students may demonstrate proficiency in mathematics by passing the Regents competency test in mathematics in either their native language or the English language. The competency test in mathematics is available in about 30 languages.

If a foreign language edition of the competency test is not available, schools may use alternative examinations to determine that a student has achieved a level of proficiency in mathematics comparable to passing the Regents competency test in mathematics.

Further Information

Further information and technical assistance may be obtained by contacting the bilingual supervisors of the Bureau of Bilingual Education, at the regional offices listed below.

The New York State Education Department
Bureau of Bilingual Education
Albany, New York 12234
518: 474-8775

The New York State Education Department
Bureau of Bilingual Education
2 Pleasant Avenue, West
Lancaster, New York 14086
716: 681-0100

The New York State Education Department
Bureau of Bilingual Education
Valentine and the Plain Roads
Westbury, New York 11590
516: 997-8700 Ext. 370

The New York State Education Department
Bureau of Bilingual Education
Two World Trade Center—Suite 5040
New York, New York 10047
212: 488-7294

SAMPLES OF ESL TESTS

	Comprehensive English Language Test for Speakers of English as a Second Language (CELT)	Orientation in American English Proficiency Test (OAE)	Criterion Referenced English Syntax Test (CREST)
Purpose	Assess English language proficiency	Measure listening, speaking, reading and writing skills	English syntax
Administration	Group	Group	Group
Grade Level	High school and adult	9–12 and adult	4–12
Time	170 minutes	150 minutes	80 minutes
Description	Three multiple-choice tests: Listening, Structure, Vocabulary	Six levels evaluate student's progress in the OAE program	Three multiple-choice tests: beginning, intermediate, and advanced
Author	Harris, David; Palmer, Leslie	Brinson, Thomas C.	
Copyright Date	1970	1974	
Publisher	McGraw Hill Book Company, International Division, 330 W. 42nd St., N.Y., N.Y. 10036	Institute of Modern Languages, Inc., 2622 Pittman Dr., Silver Spring, Maryland 20910	Board of Education of The City of New York, Office of High Schools
RECOMMENDED MINIMUM SCORES			
Years of ESL Instruction			
1	Combination of 3 sub-test scores for average total of 30%	Level 1 final: score of 65%	12 of 25 objectives on Beginning Level (50%)
2	Combination of 3 sub-test scores for average total of 35%	Level 3 final: score of 65%	20 of 25 objectives on Beginning Level (80%)
3	Combination of 3 sub-test scores for average total of 40%	Level 4 final: score of 65%	20 of 25 objectives on Intermediate Level (80%)
4	Combination of 3 sub-test scores for average total of 45%	Level 6 final: score of 65%	12 of 15 objectives on Advanced Level (80%)

MODIFICATIONS IN TESTING PROCEDURES FOR STUDENTS WITH HANDICAPPING CONDITIONS

In recognition of the special testing needs of some handicapped students, schools may modify testing procedures when the Regents competency tests are administered to students with handicapping conditions.

The table on page 16 provides guidance as to the modifications that may be made when the competency tests are administered to students with various handicapping conditions. Any of the modifications noted in the table may be used for any handicapped student. In order to be eligible for a modification, a student must have been identified by the Committee on the Handicapped of the district as having a handicapping condition, and the need for such modification must be reflected consistently in the student's Individualized Educational Plan (IEP).

Further information concerning the use of alternative testing techniques for students with handicapping conditions is available in the publication, "Alternative Testing Techniques for Children With Handicapping Conditions." The publication may be obtained by writing to:

Bureau of Elementary and Secondary Testing Programs
Room 771, Education Building Annex
State Education Department
Albany, New York 12234

Suggested Use of Alternative Testing Techniques Based Upon Learner Characteristics

Learner Characteristic	ALTERNATIVE TESTING TECHNIQUES: Time Limit Extended/ Waived	Exam Administered in a Special Location	Answers Recorded in any Manner*	Use of a Calculator or Abacus	Questions Read to Pupil**	Exam Copy provided in Braille & Large Print	Questions Omitted/ Credit Prorated
Visual Impairment	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Physical Impairment with motor difficulties	X	X	X	X	X		
Health Impairment (affecting vitality, or bowel & bladder control—may be hospitalized or at home)	X	X					X
Behavior difficulties (e.g., hyperactivity or short attention span)	X	X		X	X		X
Slow rate of processing information	X			X			
Limited eye-hand coordination	X	X	X	X			X
Inability to memorize math facts				X			
Visual perception difficulties	X		X		X	X	X
Auditory perception difficulties	X	X	X		X		X
Hearing impaired with language difficulties	X	X	X	X	X		X
Labored speech	X	X					
Need for special equipment	X	X	X	X			

* Includes use of a tape recorder or dictation to an amanuensis.
** Includes use of sign language and cued speech, audio or visual tape.

IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENTS NEEDING SPECIAL HELP

One of the most important features of the Regents Competency Testing Program is the early identification of students who need special help in developing their skills in reading comprehension, writing, and mathematics. This identification process begins in the primary grades and makes use of both formal and informal assessment techniques.

Among the formal techniques are a series of State screening tests. The Commissioner's Regulations requires schools to provide remediation to students who obtain scores below the State Reference Point for any of these tests. The screening tests in each skill area are described below.

Reading Comprehension

Screening tests in reading comprehension are administered to all students at the end of grades 3 and 6 and to selected students in either grade 8 or grade 9. The screening test for grades 8 or 9 is administered only to those students who were unable to obtain a score above a specified point on either the State's grade 6 screening test or a standardized reading test administered in grade 7, 8, or 9.

The screening tests use the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) methodology, which is also used in the Regents competency test. The DRP tests are designed to measure the most difficult prose text that a student can read with comprehension. If a student obtains a score that is below the State Reference Point for a screening test, the student has less than a seventy-percent likelihood of success in comprehending material found in textbooks commonly used in the grade in which the student is tested.

Writing

Screening tests in writing are administered to all students at the end of grade 5 and to selected students in either grade 8 or grade 9. The screening test for grades 8 or 9 is administered only to those pupils who were unable to score above a specified point on the State's grade 5 screening test.

The grade 5 screening test consists of two writing tasks. Each writing task requires an answer of about 150 words and the answers are rated holistically using a scale of 1–4. The format and scoring procedures for the grades 8 or 9 screening test are the same as those for the Regents

Competency Test in Writing, which is described earlier in this publication.

Students who obtain scores below the State Reference Points on these tests are unlikely to meet the writing competency standard required for a high school diploma without special help to improve their writing skills.

Mathematics

Screening tests in mathematics are administered to all students at the end of grades 3 and 6. Both tests are based on the elementary mathematics program recommended for New York State schools. Each test contains about 65 questions.

Students who obtain scores below the State Reference Points on these tests are unlikely to meet the mathematics competency standard required for a high school diploma without special help to improve their mathematics skills.